**DOCUMENT RESUME**

ED 319 629 SE 051 447

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| AUTHOR | Disinger, John F.; And Others |
| TITLE | Recent Developments in College Level Environmental Studies Courses and Programs. ERIC/SMEAC Environmental Education Digest No. 2, 1988. |
| INSTITUTION | ERIC Clearinghouse for Science, Mathematics, and Environmental Education, Columbus, Ohio. |
| SPONS AGENCY | Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC. |
| REPORT NO | EDO-SE-88-10 |
| PUB DATE | 88 |
| CONTRACT | RI88062006 |
| NOTE | 4p. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | ERIC/SMEAC, The Ohio State University, 1200 Chambers Road, Room 310, Columbus, OH 43212 ($1.00 single copy; ordered in sets by year and area $3.00). |
| PUB TYPE | Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | *College Programs; College Science; Curriculum; *Educational Trends; *Environmental Education; *Higher Education; *Program Improvement; *Science and Society |

ABSTRACT

This digest identifies characteristics of successful higher education programs in environmental studies and trends in environmental studies programs and courses. Characteristics of programs that have continued for the past two decades are listed. Some of the variables associated with programs that have not continued are identified. Recent trends related to the programs in environmental studies include: (1) an increase in the number of courses including environmental concerns; (2) a small increase in the number of general education courses with emphasis on environment; (3) an increase of internships and research experiences; (4) an increase in the number of technically-oriented programs; (5) an increase in course offerings for adult education and post-degree training; and (6) development of courses related to science/technology/society. Seven references are listed. (YP)

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# RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN COLLEGE LEVEL ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES COURSES AND PROGRAMS

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ERIC/SMEAC Environmental Education Digest EDO-SE-88-10 No. 2, 1988

# Recent Developments in College Level Environmental Studies Courses and Programs

**What are the characteristics of courses and programs in environmental studies?**

Environmental studies is a term that began to be used in the 1960's to describe some courses and programs, and if not a new discipline, a set of disciplines. Criteria usually associated with the term include the following: (1) the study of humans as they affect and are affected by their environment; (2) concern for the total environment including social, cultural, economic, aesthetic, physical and biological aspects; (3) interdisciplinary approaches; (4) clarification of open-ended options for environmental concerns, rather than short-term solutions; and (5) integrated environmental management that expresses ethical dimensions.

Environmental studies can encompass, but are not synonymous with the environmental sciences. Environmental studies seek to bring perspective to both the sciences and the arts.

**What is the status of environmental studies in higher education?**

What is the current state-of-the-art of environmental studies in colleges and universities today? More or less? Better or worse? How have the programs which started a few years ago managed in terms of growth and survival? Are there discernable patterns of evolution, with respect to environmental studies programs? This digest identifies characteristics of successful programs in environmental studies and trends in environmental studies programs and courses.

**What are the characteristics of programs established in the 1970's that exist today?**

In 1978 Schoenfeld and Disinger (1978) investigated characteristics of a representative set of environmental studies programs in higher education institutions. Harde (1982) investigated several key elements of environmental studies in higher education. Disinger and Schoenfeld (1987) conducted a follow-up study of their 1978 sample to determine changes that occurred in their sample. In addition, presentations of various programs published in annual proceedings of the North American Association for Environmental Education provide evidence of program survivability, program characteristics, and program evolution.

**What are the characteristics of successful college and university environmental education programs?**

Data from the Disinger and Schoenfeld (1987) study and others indicate that at least a large majority (about 70%) of the environmental studies programs established in the 1970's have been maintained,though in several cases with modification.

Reasons for not continuing programs tended to be related to (1) fiscal conditions or changes, (2) changes in faculty interests and values (change of faculty or retirement of faculty associated with the program), (3) the impact of traditional department values (atomistic) or holistic programs; (4) lack of a tough, focused substance area in programs, and (5) failure to modify the program to include current environmental concerns and needs such as global problems, national and international laws, and sustainable development.

Programs that have survived and have grown tend to share several of the following characteristics: (1) the program is dynamic and responds to changes within the fields the program represents as well as changes that occur as society relates to the environment; (2) the program has both theoretical and applied emphases; (3) the program provides both breadth related to the environment and depth in a field of interest; (4) the program is clearly interdisciplinary in its emphasis; (5) the primary funding source for the program is the institution; (6) the institutional administration values and supports environmental studies; (7) the program has strong staff leadership; (8) the program has been recognized for its academic quality and/or its contribution to environmental activities; (9) the philosophy of the program shows a definite commitment to environmental education values and actions; and (10) the program staff works closely with other academic units. The academic home (college or department) of the program was not a distinguishing characteristic.

Descriptions of many programs have been published in the literature. Nearly an entire issue of "The Environmental Professional" (Volume 9, N3, 1987) was devoted to descriptions of environmental studies programs. Over 20 programs, all from different institutions, are described. In addition, conference proceedings from the annual meeting of the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAEE) have also included presentations on environmental studies programs.

**What are recent trends related to postsecondary courses and programs in environmental studies?**

Analyses of recent developments in courses and programs indicate the following:

1. There has been an increase in the number of courses that include environmental concerns. Courses that have infused topics related to the environment include both the sciences and the social sciences and represent the primary academic exposure that college and university students have to environmental concepts, issues, and values. Infusion appears to occur most frequently in geology, biology, geography, economics, political science, literature, and sociology.

2. There has been a small increase in the number of general education courses with major emphases on the environment and environmental issues. These have developed most frequently in liberal arts institutions, smaller public colleges and universities, and institutions with established programs in environmental studies. With the increased interest in environmental issues and problems and global concerns, several institutions have developed global study programs and courses. Analyses of presentations at meetings and the published literature indicate the number of courses related to global issues and problems will continue to increase.

3. The number of institutions that have experiences that extend beyond the campus to provide internships and research experiences has increased. Students in some environmental studies programs are required (and encouraged in others) to have relevant intern or research experiences. Internships include both traditional experiences such as parks, state government and federal government positions, but also include research center activities and internships with local and regional government units and corporations.

4. There has been a continuing increase in the number of technically oriented programs both in four-year institutions and community colleges. Environmental compliance, management, and inspection have become increasing complex and frequently require personnel with technical backgrounds. To respond to both the market for these people in the public and private sector and also to the student interest for programs, there has been a rapid growth of such programs. The greatest number of courses and programs have been developed in the engineering and health sciences.

5. Course offerings for adult education and post-degree training have also increased. A variety of courses developed for adult education relate to current environmental issues and problems. Some general courses are offered, but many focus on local and regional environmental concerns. As new concerns emerge related to the environment and as technical requirements for some environmentally-related jobs increase, institutions are providing courses to meet these needs when they are located where a sufficient number of students reside. Some are exploring the use of distance education to provide these courses.

6. Courses related to Science/Technology/Society (STS) have been developed at several institutions. Many of these contain environmental study components, but most are not a formal part of an environmental studies program.

7. During the 1960's and 1970's several colleges were organized with an environmental studies emphasis (Evergreen State College, Olympia,Washington; Huxley College of Environmental Studies, Western Washington University; University of Wisconsin-Green Bay). The development of colleges with an environmental studies emphasis, while never a trend, did not extend to many other institutions in the 1980's.

## Summary

Environmental studies have survived the past two decades. Characteristics associated with courses and programs that have survived and continue to develop are identified and provide useful guidelines for those developing new courses or programs or working to maintain a current program. Recent trends related to environmental courses and programs provide an indication of current program directions.

During the past two years there has been a resurgence of public interest in the environment and environmental problems. There also has been a growing awareness by governmental and corporate groups that the environment should receive more attention for short-term and long-term consequences.

These conditions provide opportunities and challenges for faculty and staff with interests in environmental studies. Now is a good time to review courses and programs to determine the extent to which they are meeting current student and environmental needs and to determine how they can be improved.

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This digest was funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education under contract no. RI-88062006. Opinions expressed in this digest do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or the Department of Education.